

Rules and Procedures Committee

31st Representative Town Meeting

Town of Groton, Connecticut

Date: Tuesday, May 1st 6:30p

Location: Groton Senior Center Classroom A

Members: Reps. Kate Richards, Karin Adams, Douglas Monaghan, Irma Streeter, Michael Whitehouse

Members Present: Reps. Kate Richards, Karin Adams, Douglas Monaghan, Irma Streeter

Members Absent: Rep. Michael Whitehouse

Also in Attendance: Reps. Scott Newsome and Syma Ebbin, note Rep. Roseann Kotowski was present for the first few minutes of the meeting as well

The meeting was called to order at 6:33pm.

2018-0111 Revise the RTM Rules to Move Committee Business

Discussion:

Reps. Streeter, Monaghan and Adams brought up that getting to RTM business earlier is a benefit of changing the order of business and noted the late meeting times of the past few RTM meetings.

Rep. Richards stated a possible negative is that moving the reports from the Town Manager, Economic Development, Superintendent of Schools and liaisons may result in RTM members missing some of the information they share if the RTM members should they choose to leave the meeting after the committee results and may also result in the loss of a quorum.

Rep. Newsome added that the town staff would need to sit through the RTM business before presenting to the RTM information that is useful for future decision-making, which may be viewed as disrespectful of their time.

There was discussion of limiting the time allowed to presenters in an effort to resolve the issue that Rep. Marshall intended to be helped by moving the order of business.

Rep. Ebbin brought up idea of the Rules & Procedures Committee making rule to cap time allotted to town staff and liaisons. She stated that in Robert's Rules members are capped at 10 minutes and the Town Manager and Superintendent are ex-officio members that can be capped as well. Rep. Ebbin stated she plans to notify presenters that future time in meeting will be limited to ten minutes and questions may follow.

There was a general discussion of the length of recent presentations and the best way to ensure the RTM is efficiently using its time. Rep. Richards brought up the value of information shared by town staff and questions by RTM members to clarify and understand the implications of the information

presented. Rep. Adams stated that sometimes questions go on tangents and can prolong the time before getting to RTM business. Discussion followed about the pros and cons of limiting the time of presenters versus changing the order of business. There was concern that changing the Order of Business may cause more problems than it solves.

Motion to Revise the Rules to Move Committee Business made by Rep. Richards, seconded by Rep. Monaghan

Vote on 2018-0111 Revise the Rules to Move Committee Business:

The RTM does here by amend Section 5 of the RTM Rules of the 31st Representative Town Meeting to move item (J) Reports of Committees to the line above item (F) Report of Town Manager on the agenda.

In favor 0, oppose 5, abstain 0 – unanimously vote in opposition of proposal

The recommendation is to not change the order of events and, instead, the Moderator use her position to limit the time town staff and liaisons have to ten minutes. More time may be allotted at the discretion of the Moderator and based on the benefit to the RTM.

2018-0112 Review of the Rules of the 31st RTM

Discussion:

All committee members reviewed Rule 6.5.3.

Rep. Newsome and Rep. Ebbin discussed the four instances of suspending the rules during the term of the 31st RTM and the circumstances of each. It was noted that the way the motions were placed before the RTM were different in the December 2017 meeting regarding the Ordinance to combine the Planning and Zoning Commissions, the January 2018 meeting regarding the Education budget and April 2018 meeting regarding two Finance items. There were questions from committee members as to why these items are not coming to the RTM with enough time to go through committee.

Rep. Newsome stated that suspending the rules should be abnormal. There was discussion of how committee meetings are important because they allow for a deeper and more informal discussion of a smaller group on the relevant issues. In discussion, committee members said there are times that it is sensible to suspend the rules to have the RTM vote on a motion that has not gone through committee, but it should be avoided without an urgent need.

Rep. Richards noted that in April there was an explanation as to why the first Finance item should be discussed on that day prior to a vote to suspend the rules, however, there was no reason given to justify suspending the rules before the vote to suspend the rules for the second Finance item and a motion to suspend the rules is not debatable. Also, the two Finance items had been approved by the Town Council on 4/3/18 which means they could have been referred to the RTM Finance Committee seven days prior to the following RTM meeting in accordance with the RTM rules.

Rep. Richards noted that the Finance Committee already had planned to meet on 4/4/18 to discuss the Crystal Road Project, perhaps the two items could have been added to the meeting or an additional

meeting scheduled to follow the RTM procedures. The RTM was not given an explanation as to why this was not done.

There followed a general discussion on the RTM Rules. They belong to the RTM and can be interpreted and changed by the RTM. There was also discussion of the role of the Town Clerk and Moderator in determining the RTM's agenda. The two Finance items were listed on the April agenda as if they had gone through committee, as they were placed under the "Committee Reports" section of the agenda with no indication that they had not gone through committee or why they had not. In December the item had been listed under "Other Business" and presented as requiring a suspension of the rules by the Moderator, along with an explanation of the timing, and in January the Education budget was not on the agenda at all.

Committee members discussed their interpretations of Rule 6.5.3. There was a consensus that Rule 6.5.3 does not allow RTM business to bypass committee.

The committee then considered how an item should be presented to the RTM if there was not an opportunity for the committee to meet and it is urgent to have a vote at the next meeting. Discussion followed about Rule 6.5.1 and Rule 6.5.2. Rep. Monaghan suggested some changes to the rules to make clear the procedures for setting the agenda and suspending the rules.

Rep. Richards proposed options for presenting this type of item on the agenda, the first was to list it under "Other Business" with notation explaining why it had not gone through committee and the second to not list it on the agenda at all and instead have the Moderator, Town Manager, or Department Head introduce it verbally under "Other Business" with an explanation as to why RTM members should consider suspending the rules to discuss and vote on it. The consensus of the committee was to place the item under "Other Business," not under "Committee Reports" as on the April agenda.

There was general discussion of how the RTM agenda is set. Committee members proposed that if there is no time for an item to go through committee, then it should be reviewed by the Moderator who may concur, or not, with the Town Clerk that it is urgent and place it on the agenda. It was noted that these instances will require timely review.

Rep. Monaghan suggested the option to change Rule 3.2 by adding after the text "and control the agenda" in order for the Moderator to have a say on what is included in the agenda. Rep. Newsome suggested the rules not be changed, stating it was not needed to address the referral. The committee agreed that at this time a recommendation to the RTM and Town Clerk made sense, but if needed a rule change like the one proposed by Rep. Monaghan may be proposed in the future.

In summary, the Committee unanimously agrees that the RTM Rules require items to go through committee and for an item to be acted upon by the RTM without going through committee the RTM Rules must be suspended. The Committee recommends that only urgent and exceptional matters be presented to the RTM that require a suspension of the rules and the Moderator should review and concur that these items be added to the agenda as possible. Any item that does not go through committee should be placed under the agenda heading "Other Business."

2018-0056 Three Referrals from Rep. Kotowski

All members agreed there was no need to discuss the three referrals further as they were discussed in the last committee meeting.

Motion to adjourn/second: Reps. Monahan/Adams

Meeting adjourned at 8:01p

Meeting minutes prepared by the Chairperson Richards